2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Little girls have a perfectly free life until they reach marriageable age, when their freedom is somewhat more restricted. After marriage they are still more secluded, but the degree of seclusion varies, being rather stricter among the better-class peasants than among those of lower social status. Among the latter there may be considerable freedom of intercourse between the sexes. It must be remembered that there are quite definite social grades among the *fellāḥīn*, the lines of demarcation being very strongly em-

FIG. 14. A MOTHER WITH HER CHILDREN

phasized. For instance, in a family well known to me the women are not allowed to speak freely to the men, and, with the exception of the elderly mother, none of the females are allowed to enter a room in which male visitors may be seated, and even the mother does not appear unless there is something which renders her presence necessary. One of the women in this family is a widow of about thirty years of age, possibly a little older, and her brother objects to her even being seen walking in the streets of their village, except when she goes, accompanied by her mother, to get the water for household use or for some other necessary purpose. He told me that if he allowed her to be seen walking about in public

THE FELLĀḤIN OF UPPER EGYPT

562 places his family would at once lose their position, and they would
565 be looked down upon as nobodies. To our Western ideas such
521 restrictions are apt to be regarded as a form of tyranny, but it is
577 not a fair judgment. Seclusion is partly a sign of respect among Egyptians, and indicates the value that the men put upon their womenfolk. Most of the women have unfortunately a difficult and
181 dangerous temperament, which, until they have learnt self-control,
542 and have been inspired with higher ideals, makes them anything
152 but an elevating influence in village society.

Though theoretically they are supposed to be entirely in sub-
562 jection to the male sex, in practice they can, and often do, maintain
593 a very firm hold on their husbands. I have known many men who are in mortal terror of their wives. Indeed, I am often inclined to think that it is the poor oppressed Egyptian *man* who has a claim to my sympathy, and that the over-ruled, oppressed wife is somewhat of a myth.

583 More often than not a man marries a girl from his own village, the favourite marriage being with a daughter of his father's brother. On the smallest provocation, some imagined slight, for
593 example, a girl will run off to her father's or brother's house, and
578 remain there until her husband, from fear of mischief being made against him in the village by his wife's relations, is induced to agree to do whatever his wife demands of him. She may require him to buy her gold earrings, a nose-ring, an anklet, or fine clothes, and, though a poor man, he may feel obliged to purchase one or
[406] more of these articles for fear of what his wife may do. Many men have run into debt for such reasons.

586 A man of my acquaintance, who owns a certain amount of land
428 and is by way of being one of the rather superior people of his
581 village, divorced his wife a year or two ago. She was quite a decent woman, but, her relations being poor, she had no land of her own, and, moreover, her husband's brother had died, bequeathing his widow a *feddān* (acre) of land and a little money. My acquaintance had his eye on this land, which was family property, belonging originally to his father, and the only way he could obtain it was by marrying his brother's widow. He did not want to have two wives, for
[595] it is expensive to keep up such an establishment ; also, monogamy is becoming much more common in Egypt, and to have more than one wife is looked upon as rather barbarous even among the peasants. The only thing to do was to get rid of his first wife.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
Ancient Egypt MR5

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ANALOGIES

FA 342 565

The poorer classes lived in tumbledown dwellings similar to those in which they live at the present time, as can be seen from the clay models of such houses dating from the Herakleopolitan Period (*c.* 2445–2160 B.C.).[1] Houses exactly like those of the respectable but not well-to-do *fellāḥīn* have recently been found at el-'Amarneh.[2]

The portico, so marked a feature of the better type of modern

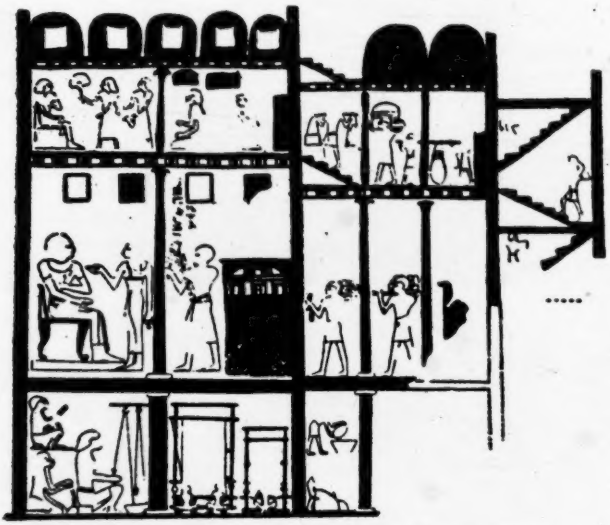

FIG. 154. AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TWO-STORIED HOUSE
After A. M. Blackman, *Luxor and its Temples*, p. 3.

house (*cf.* p. 228, Fig. 134), especially the country house or house enclosed in a garden, was no less a feature of the ancient mansions also, as can be seen from numerous representations of such belonging to different periods.[3]

FA 352

The *maṣṭabeh* outside the house-door (p. 32) was probably no less frequent in an ancient than it is in a modern Egyptian town

[A 113]

[1] H. Schaefer and W. Andrae, *Die Kunst des alten Orients* (Berlin, 1925), p. 267; W. Wreszinski, *op. cit.*, Pl. 48*b*, 2.

[2] T. E. Peet and C. L. Woolley, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 ff.; see also W. Wreszinski, *op. cit.*, Pl. 48*b*, 4.

[3] See, for example, J. Capart, *L'art égyptien*, vol. i, "L'architecture" (Brussels, 1922), Pl. 110; A. Erman and H. Ranke, *op. cit.*, p. 207; H. E. Winlock, "The Egyptian Expedition, 1918–1920," Part II of *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*, December, 1920, pp. 24 f.

INTRODUCTION

ON UNDERSTANDING THE FELLAH

A country's peasantry is like the small particles in a sentence, or the strips of leading in a stained-glass window. It binds the nation together, gives it stability and character. It provides that humble but indispensable support on which both economic and social systems rely. By producing more than it consumes, the peasantry maintains society in health, and ensures a sound regularity to the state finances.

But the peasantry as a class is composed of separate individuals, of men. Enslaved as they may be to soil and seasons, long-suffering and slow, hide-bound and unprogressive as they appear to us, it is these people above all others who deserve the name of men.

Too long have we confused the producer with his product and the worker with the fruits of his labour. We have taken our fill of the harvest without a thought for the man who made it grow. We have failed to notice the distress which he himself could not put into words, and perhaps only half felt. And so today we are astonished at the reawakening of the peasantry, and realise with a shock of surprise what a dead weight of ignorance has been allowed to accumulate, both in official circles and in society at large, about the man of the soil.

By developing the themes of pastoralism and of natural beauty, and so confounding the peasant with his background, poets and artists of all ages, from Virgil to the present day, have conspired to draw a veil of illusion over the realities of country life. They have given us wonderful pictures, to be sure, but in so doing they have accustomed us to see in country life nothing but its picturesque and sentimental side, to find in an image the whole reality. The "sower's

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3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Egypt MR1

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

EGYPT AN OLIGARCHY

E F 565

In Egyptian politics and society the peasantry has always constituted the primal mass, and as it were the raw material; the foundation, almost the sub-soil, on which government and society are based. This double structure must now be considered before we can look more closely at the fellah's way of life.

E F 369

The façade of contemporary Egypt, modern and composite in style, is represented by the country's three great cities with their striking, many-sided activity. There is Cairo, with its two universities (having nearly 20,000 students), its palaces and museums, its scientific institutions, its international congresses and winter lecture-courses. There is Alexandria, with its busy port and Cotton Exchange, its foreign institutions, its fashionable beaches and esplanade. There is Port Said, gateway to the East, with the Suez Canal and all its traffic. These cities compose a sort of triptych, in which large and varied groups standing side by side conceal the fundamental Egypt, just as the stones of a mosaic hide the grey cement which supports them.

E F 101

Just as it was once usual to speak of 'All the Russias', so today, from a social point of view, one might well talk of Egypt in the plural. There is no single Egyptian people, in the usual literary or historical sense of this word, but only a seething assemblage of the most varied types, which has no real correspondence with the country itself. Neither is there a true peasant community, but only a homogeneous mass of peasants bound to the soil and isolated in their villages.

3

427 ther shots had been fired into the air. Seven of the policemen
625 were wounded by stones thrown at them by the villagers.
579 Several villagers were arrested, and a judicial enquiry was
423 opened. This incident, which took place in 1936, is by no means abnormal. As is usual on such occasions, the landowner himself was absent.

423 The big landowner, even if he be of fellah origin — and
427 the proportion of land owned by native Egyptians is
369 ever on the increase — takes no interest in his *ezba* except as a source of income. Like the absentee landlords of Irish history, or the pluralist rectors of seventeenth-century England, he goes as seldom, and stays as short a time, as possible. He knows his labourers only by the cash which his *nâzir* sends him; their families he does not know at all. Of their lives and needs as human beings and members of society he is sublimely ignorant. For the big landowner is Europeanised. He lives in Cairo or Alexandria and spends the summer in Europe. Everyone knows how prodigal he is of his wealth, the wealth of Egypt. In one evening he will fling away enough to keep his fellaheen alive for a whole year. Their poverty and his own luxury seem equally natural to him.

565 Between his men and himself there is no sort of bond.
643 He has no traditions linking him to this or that village. In Egypt today there is no landed aristocracy, only an aristocracy of wealth; and wealth gravitates to the town.

It is related that on one of his visits to the country the late King Fuad stopped to witness the songs and dances which a few fellaheen had improvised for him by the wayside. A courtly minister was astonished at this condescension and said:

'What generosity, Your Majesty, to waste ten minutes like this!'

'But for these fellaheen, Your Excellency,' replied the King, 'you would not have an income of five thousand pounds, nor be either a minister or a pasha.'

565 Contempt for the fellah has become so deep rooted in the
369 minds of his 'superiors' that the very word has become the worst of insults. Call anyone 'fellah', and it is as if you had said 'lout', 'scum', or even worse. Among the rich there is often complete indifference to the fellaheen. For them

the fellaheen are mere 'creatures', in which there is no point in interesting oneself, and which it is considered good form to know nothing about. Faced with the simplest of queries about them, the rich often show an ignorance which makes it quite clear that such questions have never occured to them, and arouse no curiosity. Even the best of them, while deploring the dullness and hidebound habits of the fellah, will do nothing to help him that might lessen their own income. All this maintains the gulf between the two extremes. 565 369

There is, however, a country middle class, consisting of medium landowners. Like the smallholders, they are closely attached to the village. Conservative, gain-loving and unpretentious, they live in the country and keep a close watch on the yield of their feddans. At feasts and funerals they give generously to their poor neighbours. From this class are drawn the pupils who fill the primary and secondary schools in the provinces, the students of the religious institutes dependent on Al-Azhar, the Government employees, and a number of police officers. It has produced the great men of contemporary Egypt, such as Sheikh Mohammed Abdou, Saad Zaghloul Pasha, Nahas Pasha, and Dr Taha Hussein. 565 423 181

These patriarchal families are, however, becoming fewer and fewer. One reason is the growth of their wealth and ambition. The second generation makes its way into the higher levels, and settles in Cairo or Alexandria. This exodus from the fields was largely encouraged by the boom of 1919-20, but apart from this the westernised education of the young and the taste for European things have produced a distaste for country life. Cairo and Alexandria, during the last fifteen years, have developed considerably in size and in amenities. Every year there is a new influx of wealthy provincials from the chief towns and villages in all the mudiriyas. Villas and blocks of flats spring up everywhere and luxury shops do a thriving trade. 556 565 166

A second reason for the decay of this middle class is the splitting up of estates by inheritance, for families are large. According to Moslem Law, which is universally applicable, the sons receive two parts each to the daughter's one. It is by no means unusual to find the grandson of a man who had 40 feddans inheriting no more than one, so that he falls back to the level of the fellaheen. 565 428 423

181 and mistrust. He puts up with the cruellest treatment from them, and they, despising him as they do, whether they be Egyptians or foreigners, believe that such methods are a necessity.

181 A rich landowner of my acquaintance, an excellent fellow
● 565 at heart, declared: 'The fellaheen must be driven with the
694 lash.' A *moâwen* of the police who, as I entered his office, was raining blows on a man up for trial replied to my expression of astonishment: 'This is how you have to treat them. They are beasts.'

369 So great is the cleavage between town and country, between the still uncivilised fellah and the more or less Westernised townsman, that the gulf is neither narrow nor recent. In a private letter written three centuries before Christ these words are found: 'Do not take me for an Egyptian fellah.' Then as now the representatives of the town appeared in the village only to take their rents, or to levy the taxes due to the State [19].

121 We are not for the moment discussing the fellah's psychology; but it must be said in conclusion to this chapter that although he is much sought after as a taxpayer or producer he is still unknown as a man and neglected as a citizen.

565 The political and economic pyramid of Egypt bears down with all its weight on the fellah. The oligarchy at the top may have changed its form, but pressure at the base, that is on the fellah, has been little relieved.

His ignorance, his isolation, his bondage to the soil, prevent him from putting up any resistance to this crushing burden; and it is a burden which moulds his whole life.

183 The women are more intelligent than the men. Sir
184 William Willcocks, whose great achievements in irrigation by no means prevented him from studying the fellaheen, explains the difference thus: — "A bad government, if passively accepted by men, who are naturally active, will sooner or later demoralise them. The same government, if passively submitted to by women, who are naturally passive, tends on the contrary to develop their intelligence. That is why the fellah women are not only more intelligent, but more trustworthy than the men (*)".

This opinion is open to discussion. The fact it seeks to explain — the traditional feminism of Egypt — is quite clear.

181 The fellah's wife is also more cunning than her husband,
183 which is saying a good deal. Like all weak people the fellah
562 practises cunning to the point of duplicity. He knows how to conceal his joy, his suffering or his crime. His inexpressive features are a great help. In his shifts and dodges — when he leaves it to time to decide, when he agrees without any intention of keeping his word, when he uses evasive language or purposely misunderstands — he shows an adaptability which is indeed a kind of intelligence, but intelligence at the level of instinct.

181 The fellah seems lacking in logic. In reality his ideas
[823] run parallel, and he judges by his own standards. Ask a fellah how far it is to a certain village, and he will reply "A piastre bus-ride".

181 The *'omda* understands this mentality perfectly. "Go
565 to your father, my lad, and tell him that the Bey (his creditor) is waiting here for him. If your father isn't there, tell him to come all the same, for the Bey knows that he is there." And the father, his bluff called in advance, comes along without any trouble at all.

181 The truth is that the fellah does not think outside the immediate present; he is fettered to the actual moment. No time and place except the present have much effect on his mind, because they have none on his senses. He is like a primitive man or a child; his intellect is controlled by his senses, and remains close to things felt and done. The fellah looks for causes and effects in the field not of reason, sight. Life to him is a succession but of todays. That is why he seems illogical.

F 747 to be humane. This is shown by a growing number of articles in the Egyptian Press, as well as by, for instance, a recent film-production entitled *Asifa 'ala-l-Rif* (Storm over the Village), which deals courageously with the problem of the fellah and his masters.

E F 565 747 It is none the less clear that the educated classes have neglected their responsibilities. They have turned away from the masses and devoted themselves to politics, literature, or European travel. They have been self-centred or, as some would say, unpatriotic enough to keep their culture and their wealth strictly to themselves. It is true that every now and again from their ivory tower they have commended enthusiastically the earthy qualities of the fellah, but they have never done much to help him. The occasional meetings of the governing classes with the fellaheen have something theatrical about them, and what is theatrical is obviously not real.

E F 747 184 A member said lately in the Chamber "In this country, when a Prime Minister visits a village, he is accompanied by an escort of some three hundred soldiers, not to mention officers and high officials. Under such conditions he cannot get into touch with the people of the place or find out what they really need" (**). The honourable member went on to suggest that ministers should find out for themselves the true state of the people.

F 183 185 748 Thus the fellah, like a neglected child who grows up without thinking or learning anything, has remained rooted to the ground. The earth has stopped him from sinking yet lower ; it has preserved and sustained him, but it could not elevate him. The essential need of the fellaheen is to be awakened and revived to their heritage of humanity.

This is the task of the upper classes, and especially of those who are most concerned with the land : landowners, agricultural engineers, and all who live in the country or visit it in the course of their work, such as merchants, bank-employees, and Government officials. These people should no longer confine themselves to economic administration or political relations with the fellaheen, but should also make an effort to create disinterested human contacts. This is the only way to do any good. It is noticeable how much encouragement the fellaheen derive from the simplest of visits to our village schools by notables or townspeople,

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

Invitations.

113.

The girl makes pretense of showing her lover one of the sand-banks which emerge from the Nile, suffer many changes and disappear, according to the season of the year. Here, of course, it is only a cloak (Maḥmûd).

Ya tara, ya ḥabîbi,
kuntê fên el-yôm?
ša'rak mesabsab,
we-'ênak sable lin-nôm.
Iṭla' bina 'aṣr 'ali,
ninâm we-nišba' nôm.
wafarragak 'ala-l-gezîre,
illi-tnašet el-yôm.

Where, my beloved,
Hast thou been today?
Thy hair hangs on thy brow
And thine eye is heavy with sleep.
Let us mount a lofty house
And sleep till we are sated with sleep.
And I will show thee the island
Which has formed itself today.

3. Literally: hangs straight down.

5. 'aṣr, literally: castle, designates a solidly built structure with an upper story. Even a house such as the middle class in the cities possess, is, in the country beside the miserable peasant-huts, designated as 'aṣr, "castle" (Vollers).